

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 8520

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, NI, SHUM
SUBJECT: FMG BANS NEWBREED MAGAZINE

REF: LAGOS 7959

1. IN A SURPRISE MOVE, THE FMG BANNED NEWBREED MAGAZINE ON JUNE 28 FOR TWO YEARS. UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE NEWSPAPERS (PROHIBITION ON CIRCULATION) DECREE NO. 17 PROMULGATED IN 1967, THE FMG ORDER WHICH WAS SIGNED BY HEAD OF STATE OBASANJO TOOK EFFECT ON JUNE 14 AND PROHIBITED THE CIRCULATION OF NEWBREED IN NIGERIA. THE NIGERIA SECURITY ORGANIZATION (NSO) IMPOUNDED 50,000 COPIES OF NEWBREED WHEN THEY ARRIVED AT MURTALA MUHAMMED AIRPORT FROM THE PUBLISHERS IN ENGLAND. THE BAN WAS THE CULMINATION OF A SUCCESSION OF ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN NEWBREED AND THE FMG WHICH INCLUDED A RIGOROUS SEARCH AND INTERROGATION OF EDITOR IN CHIEF CHRIS OKOLIE AT THE AIRPORT IN MAY.

2. IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE BAN, IT WAS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT THE FMG ACTED TO
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HEAD OFF THE JUNE ISSUE WHICH CONTAINED A COVER STORY ASKING "WHO'S GANGING UP AGAINST CHIEF AWOLOWO" AND A FEATURE ARTICLE ENTITLED "THE USES AND ABUSES OF THE NSO." HOWEVER, THE DATE OF THE BAN, JUNE 14, AND THE RECORD OF PAST CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE NEWBREED AND THE FMG RAISE THE POSSIBILITY THAT AN EARLY ISSUE HAD

BEEN THE CAUSE OF THE ORDER. THIS CONJECTURE WAS PARTIALLY CONFIRMED WHEN CHIEF OF STAFF YAR'ADUA, IN RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM THE NIGERIAN TRIBUNE, SAID THAT THE NSO ARTICLE WAS "IN BAD TASTE"; HOWEVER, THE MAIN REASON FOR THE BAN WAS A MAY NEWBREED ARTICLE, "THE DRIFT CONTINUES", WHICH CRITICIZED THE PERFORMANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT. YAR'ADUA ALSO SAID THAT THE FMG HAD HAD CAUSE TO BAN NEWBREED IN THE PAST BECAUSE OF ITS ARTICLES ON BIAFRAN LEADER COL. OJUKWU

3. NEWBREED EDITOR OKOLIE IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS HAS BEEN PHILOSOPHICAL ABOUT THE BAN AND APPARENTLY INTENDS TO DEVOTE HIS ENERGY TO HIS BUSINESS MAGAZINE, THE PRESIDENT.

4. COMMENT: IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE FMG ACTED AGAINST NEWBREED NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF ITS VARIOUS OFFENDING ARTICLES BUT ALSO TO MAKE IT AN EXAMPLE FOR THE REST OF THE PRESS. WITH THE LIFTING OF THE BAN ON POLITICS, IT IS EASY TO IMAGINE THAT THE RAMBUNCTIOUS NIGERIAN PRESS WILL BE MORE TEMPTED THAN EVER TO STEP ACROSS THE INFORMAL BOUNDARIES THAT THE FMG HAS MAINTAINED ON CRITICISM OF SENSITIVE AGENCIES SUCH AS THE CONFIDENTIAL

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NSO OR ON COMMENTARY ON ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS. THUS, THE BAN MAY BE A WARNING AS WELL AS A CHANCE TO GET RID OF A PUBLICATION THE FMG HAS NEVER PARTICULARLY CARED FOR. EASUM

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